NEVER IN THIS WORLD[1]

By STEPHEN MOREHOUSE AVERY

WOVEN into the high green background of Connecticut meadows, a bright strand of road mounted between low gray walls of piled field stones. Sections of the wall were blanketed with climbing roses, and an offshore breeze, braced with salt, bore also a moist fragrance of the earth itself, for it was that time of year and it was morning. Farther on up the rise a very tiny girl, perched atop the wall, made a bluer spot against the blue sky, and a black spot, zigzagging aimlessly in the road as he climbed toward her, was a very small, venturing boy.

The tiny girl watched his approach with her head cocked alertly, her flying hair swarming with sunbeams, a tuneless, speculative child's hum on her lips, until finally he stopped in the road opposite and stared at her with an unabashed, brown-eyed fixity which meant that she was something to be examined, judged and rated against other strange discoveries.

As for him, he was not strange. He was just a sturdy little lad in improvised pants, scuffed shoes and a cap which was yanked so askew over his eyes that he had to tilt back his head to see her. Presently an impulse of male initiative emerged from his uncertainty. With a thrust of his chunky arms deep into his pants pockets, he said, "Want to race?"

That was by way of testing her reality. Little girls, according to his standard, never had front teeth, always wore rubber bands around their bobtails of straight hair, and spent their whole lives teasing, tattling, bawling and asking for your candy—if you had any. But this one was more like the picture on the cover of Tommy Wilcox's bedtime story book, and her first remark made him wonder if she weren't lost out of there. "Paul doesn't allow me to race," she said, "not since I fell asleep chasing Mr. Red Top. That's the clover fairy."

The small boy thought it all over and then with subtle relevancy said, "I'm seven."

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But she only smiled happily and turned her blue-eyed, shell-clear bit of a face to the breeze so that her glinting hair blew. "Soon I'll be grown up, too. I'm as good as five. What's your name?"

He scowled but told her: "It's Benny."

"Benny what?"

"Benny Trout. What's yours?"

"Mine's Susan." She laughed gayly in a high little glee.

"Susan what?"

"Susan Dodd." She evidently thought names were fun. "Paul Vane Dodd is *my* dad," she went on. "We live in that white house down there where my finger points. No, this finger. I have a puppy named Twinkle, but he is not so well today. I call *my* dad Paul."

"I got a ma," said Benny. He went over and sat in the grass at her feet, adding with a faint swagger, "I just call her ma."

"What do mas do, Benny?" Susan hopped down in the grass beside him like a flitting bird.

"Well," began Benny, feeling more comfortable in the position of an authority, "mas scrub you in the tub and tie knots in strings and give you a nickel. They always say you're filthy, but if you get a pain they rub it."

"Is that all?" Susan was apparently both surprised and relieved. "My Paul does all that. I'd much rather have Paul. You keep your ma, Benny, and I'll keep Paul." Her attention went suddenly to a bluejay which alighted on the wall a few yards away, and she called to it and beckoned it with both hands. But the bluejay didn't come.

Benny scrambled indignantly to his feet. "Bluejays can't talk. I go to school," he said flatly.

"I went to Sunday school once," put in Susan quickly, making a new bid for his interest. "They told an ugly story about a man who was going to kill his little boy and burn him up, but he did it to a ram instead. Paul told two whole new a'ventures of Princess Susanna—that's really me—and the Purple-Hooded Prince that night so I could forget about it."

Hand in hand they crossed the field toward her white house. "We do too have a picture of the Purple-Hooded Prince," said Susan. "And this is the field where I chased Mr. Red Top, who was riding a big yellow butterfly. Away over to that wall I chased him, and then I fell asleep and Paul found me and carried

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me home and said: 'Susan, you must not race.' Do you really need to race, Benny?"

Behind a desolate salt-marsh border which separates it from the sound, the village of North Mercer huddles its quaint white cottages in the shades of old elms. The New York, New Haven & Hartford rockets through North Mercer without stopping, and a stream of motors on the Boston Post passes through without halt and, for the Wilcoxes, Ripleys, Bromleys, Towsons, Trouts, who have spent two and a half centuries there, time also has passed down the quiet main street without any real effect.

Motors, movies, radios, magazines have made no difference. North Mercer has an attitude toward all those modern things—just as it has an attitude toward occasional "outsiders," such as that little Mr. Dodd and his child, who with a look of pale city bewilderment come there to catch a few years' breath and be wondered and talked about and suspected until they finally disappear and are forgotten by the Wilcoxes and Bromleys and Trouts. For who in this world, the world of North Mercer, were the Dodds?

True enough, Paul Vane Dodd, as his name appeared on a few unknown, large-print four-color books of child tales and as author of infrequent and inept things in minor magazines, was no one of importance in any world. He and his little girl—in spite of rumors, one assumed the man's wife was not living—had occupied the old Ripley house in the high meadows for the past three years and, until old Dr. Towson, who went there regularly every week, let slip something which colored their quiet, isolated life with a journalistic suspense, they were left to themselves.

Afterward, little Mr. Dodd's slight figure, his blond, young-looking but serious face, was watched eagerly for indications. His habit of standing on the station platform when the New York trains went though, his smiling, undismayed receipt of flat, brown manuscript envelopes at the post office, his once-a-week drives with his small daughter in an ancient automobile which Bromley's garage had for hire—all were observed and weighed as evidence. Dodd and his daughter were said to be very gay on those drives around the countryside, and everybody admitted the child was beautiful, so beautiful that they didn't see how little Dodd could be her father, although he was, and they surmised that the little girl's mother must have been at least a great beauty—and their surmise was correct.

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So the weeks of summer drifted by, like the serene passage of white clouds across the blue. Near the post-office door Esther Trout and Martha Towson, the doctor's sister, dropped their market talk and leaned closer together when little Mr. Dodd, nodding pleasantly, stepped by them on the way inside for his mail. "Queer about those Dodds, no trade or business, just mailing and getting back envelopes. Who knows but what his wife ran off with somebody? That's the way with New York folks. You'd think he'd be worried if what they say—"

"It's true," said Martha Towson. "My brother, Dr. Fred, says that much. Maybe Dodd just doesn't care. Doesn't even go to church, does he?"

Mrs. Trout's eager interest flared in her thin, colorless face. "No, he doesn't. And the little girl doesn't go to Sunday school either. The thing that worries me is my little Benny gettin' his young head full of the fairy nonsense they talk. It's been goin' on all summer, and yesterday he came home and told me that whereas he appeared to be little Benny Trout he was in reality none other than Prince Benjamin of the Magic Mud. He said the magic mud was to be found in the hollow below Dodd's house, that little Susan Dodd believes she actually is a fairy and pretends she can talk to bluejays and frogs and squirrels. The idea! Well, I won't have my Benny talkin' to a squirrel, and that's all there is to that."

"Well, the Reverend Ripley went to see Dodd about it once," said Martha Towson. "Did no good. Seems to me a real minister could have done something."

A younger woman, dark and with some sort of steady heat behind her half-shut eyes, stood near them, near enough to overhear. Her hands kept gripping and relaxing as though the emptiness of being a widow and childless at thirty-five hurt her with a physical pain. She watched the post-office door until Dodd came out with another flat brown envelope, and then she fell into step beside him. "I've baked the cake, Mr. Dodd," she said: "the orange cake you asked for."

He glanced at her vaguely. "That's very nice." And then, as if recalling his mind from distant thoughts: "Did I ask you to bake a cake, Mrs. Wilcox? Well, I probably did."

When he began fumbling in his pockets, she said: "Oh, you mustn't pay me. The cake is for Susan. I'll bring it over. How is the cook I found for you working out?"

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"Very well," he said. "I meant to thank you. Or did I thank you before?" His thoughts had fled again, and he did not even hear her suggestion that if Susan's little dresses needed any mending—

At the corner he glanced at his watch, bowed and left her, turning down the short side street which led to the station. The 10:12 for New York was due.

He leaned against a battered trunk on the long platform, waiting for the train while his gaze followed the bright threads of the rails southwestward out of sight, and his imagination, like an electric current, followed them to their end amid the hazy towers and the vital, clamorous thoroughfares of Manhattan. It was still, after his years of it, the distant vista of his dreaming youth against the rich mothering soil of Illinois, and the fact that its stone had proved too crushing a weight for his slender shoulders did not destroy its poetic allure.

Paul Dodd blamed himself, for he had bungled. And New York had rolled over him as it rolls over its thousands who go back West or who, bereft even of that courage, retreat beyond the sound of battle deep into Jersey or to the meadows of Connecticut, where their place of destiny is at least no more distant than a fancied horizon. And so the fairyland vistas of the towers and parades with which Paul Dodd filled Susan's wide eyes, the Marvelous City of the Purple-Hooded Prince, came to resemble strangely the evening loom of the Plaza across the end of Central Park, the glistening pinnacle of the Ritz towers in a morning sky, the multi-colored, buoyant throng of an upper Avenue noon.

The train crashed down, grinding past the trembling platform, drawing a line of blurred faces in the long rectangle of windows. One face, emerging for the fraction of a second, made Dodd lean suddenly forward. But he subsided again. How often, when he used to wander Madison Avenue and the East Forties, he had glimpsed faces which for an instant he'd thought were—well, none of them were. He had bungled that, too.

It had been Paul Dodd's life, it seemed, to be given jobs he could not quite do. A friendly editor had told him once: "You've got no iron in you, Dodd. You always waver. It ruins your work and—probably your life." Yes, his career had gone, all but the dregs of it, and Susan's mother had gone because there, too, his craftsmanship had failed. Somewhere along the line he had al-

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ways bungled. And now there was only Susan, and he wouldn't have the chance to bungle things with her.

At the curb in front of the corner drug store Dr. Towson hailed him, the old man's brooding, deeply lined face peering out from under the top of his runabout. "Just on my way over to your house, Dodd. Want to come along?"

They drove down Mercer Street, through Shore Lane, across the New Haven Pike, and finally up the hill road where Dodd's small house stood white and clear against the meadow green. "This isn't your regular day to come, is it, Doctor?"

When they stopped at the gate a shrill, piped welcome came down the wind: a tiny pink Susan and yelping, circling Twinkle, who was apparently better, had spotted their arrival from the hilltop field and started for the house. They came slowly, Susan barely skipping, remembering that she must not race.

Dr. Towson followed Dodd into his study. There was a large, flat-top desk, shelves of books, one whole row taken up by heavy medical volumes dealing with disorders of the heart. The desk was piled with manuscripts, and another neatly typed stack of sheets contained the tales he told to Susan at bedtime. She insisted upon exact repetition, and it had been necessary to write the stories out. Also, there were pipes and cigarettes and a photograph which, except for the eyes, explained why Susan was pretty. But there was a misty blue distance in Susan's eyes which did not appear in the photograph. They came from somebody else.

When they were seated Dodd said: "All right now, Doctor. What is it?"

The doctor looked up out of his thought. He liked little Dodd. Years ago he himself had started out to be a New York doctor. Things had gone wrong. "Well, it's just that I think we ought to get a specialist up here at once. I know you had Barnes, but he only confirmed my opinion. Let's try to get someone who won't—because she's getting worse, Dodd. Much worse. From the tests I made last week I'm amazed that it has gone on at all."

Paul Dodd's gaze fell. "Well, that is only what we've known all along," he said. "Sometimes I think she's getting better, but—you must be right. I'm ready, I guess."

"It's because I think you're not ready, Dodd, that I'm warning you now. What are you going to do? Afterward, I mean?"

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The little man's eyes burned with an intense blue light. "That depends," he said. "When I first found out about Susan, several years ago, I couldn't understand why she had been put into the world at all. Little children are not always happy. This is not what you would call a little child's world. And so I started out to make a little child's world for Susan."

Dr. Towson took off his spectacles and wiped them with his handkerchief. "Guess you can't do that, Dodd. Pretty hard job to make a world of any kind."

"Yes," said Dodd, "it is hard. You've got to have lots of iron in you to do a job like that. It would be an easy job to—to bungle."

"You don't want a specialist, then? We could get Harvey Preston for about five hundred. Just to be sure."

"Of course I want to be sure," said Dodd. "He wouldn't come for two hundred? I've got two hundred."

"I'll tell you," said the doctor, rising, "Preston is the right sort. You give me the two hundred and I'll see if I can get him." He walked slowly down the path, with Susan holding on to his finger, and climbed into his battered runabout that was to have been turned in on a new runabout soon. It wasn't necessary, though. As a matter of fact, he was rather attached to the little old car.

Susan returned to the porch. "I thought it was my doctor day," she said. "But he said he didn't have to hear me breathe because it wasn't."

Leaning against the door jamb, Dodd smiled. "No, I think this is the day we go driving to the Chocolate Tree. We'll have an extra driving day this week."

Susan jumped up and down with excitement. "Will the Chocolate Tree be sprouting caramels, Paul?"

"Why not?" said her father.

"And can Twinkle go, too? Because my Doctor says my Twinkle is just as well as new."

Sitting at the wheel of Bromley's old machine, which—if you looked at it in the right way—was as able to make far journeys into beautiful and fabulous lands as any other magic chariot, Paul Dodd acted as chauffeur for a princess the whole afternoon. They found the precipice over which the Purple-Hooded Prince hurled the Naughty Dragon and the Peering Pool where the Princess Susanna first discovered her Beauty and the Shining

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Highway down which the Princess Susanna would one day pass into the Marvelous City of the Purple-Hooded Prince.

"Only you and the Prince could drive this great big car, couldn't they, Paul?" Susan looked up at him from under the brim of her little leghorn hat. "Maybe even the Prince couldn't. How do I know I will like the Prince as well as you, Paul? Does he go to Benny's school?"

In the end they found the Chocolate Tree and, strangely enough, it *was* sprouting caramels, although Paul Dodd had to climb up to the second big branch to get even as many as four of them. Susan said she doubted that even the Prince could have got up that tree without somebody to boost him—and she was probably right. So they started for home and would have arrived there soon enough but for a delay caused by Twinkle, who from his special seat in the rear spied a gray rabbit crossing the road. Susan, moved by her Twinkle's obvious frenzy and after exacting his absolute promise that he would not bite the rabbit, let him out for a chase. Even so, she felt some uneasiness. "Because it looked to me, Paul, very much like a rabbit whose dad had told her that she must not race."

Susan was very tired that night, so weary as she sat humming to herself in her blue, downstairs playroom that it seemed too much trouble to turn the thick pages of her littlest picture book or to shake her bubble pipe hard enough to make the bubbles come off. Finally she went to a bottom drawer and began searching among the small white garments.

Paul Dodd was in his study working upon another manuscript, of which, as usual, he had great hopes, when Susan brought her nightgown in. "Put it on me, Paul," she said. "Because my eyes are getting sticky. I most probably can't even wait for my story."

He glanced at her quickly and carried her upstairs to her white bed. The moonlight poured down over the windowsill. Susan revived a bit when she was tucked in. "I might as well go to sleep listening to a story as listening to nothing, though," she said. "Tell me about Princess Susanna. Benny said I wasn't her. He doesn't know so very much, does he, Paul? Tell me about when I shall go to the City of the Prince and be chosen for the Queen of Beauty. When shall I go, Paul? Will you and Twinkle go, too?"

He drew again for her the glamorous picture of gilded towers

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and bright parades. "And when the Princess appears in the front seat of her chariot, which is every bit as big as our car, all the people will stand back in amazement because she is so lovely. They will say: 'Oh, the lucky Purple-Hooded Prince to find such a darling beauty! Who is she? Who is she?' And soon the news will fly like wildfire through the whole throng that it's the beautiful little Princess Susanna herself. But the Princess Susanna will not hear that because the great roar of the Marvelous City fills the deep streets. She will simply sit there smiling and waving to all the people while she proceeds slowly onward. And soon the tallest tower of all looms up ahead and she knows that the Prince must be waiting for her there—"

Susan was asleep. A faint smile still pulled lightly at the corners of her mouth, and shadows seemed to flit across the transparent smoothness of her tiny face. Several times during the night he went to look at her, but she had only sunk into a deeper sleep.

The following afternoon Paul Dodd paced his study. He sat down and tried to write a few lines, but he could not. He went out into the hall where Dr. Towson's hat and bag rested on the table and beside them another hat and a stick. He went out upon the porch and walked up and down rapidly, mumbling and debating something with himself. Towson's runabout stood parked at the gate, and in the end he walked out and sat in the driver's seat, waiting.

Soon, although it seemed hours, Dr. Towson and the other appeared in the doorway and came slowly toward him out on the flagged walk, talking rapidly in low voices. The man from the city tapped the walk with his stick. The ear phones of his stethoscope stuck out of his handkerchief pocket. Towson cleared his throat. "Dr. Preston can give us no hope, Dodd," he said. "In fact, quite the reverse. He thinks it is astonishing that she has lasted through the past six months with her heart in that shape."

Dr. Preston murmured something about "These scarlet-fever hearts. I'm afraid she has not many days, Mr. Dodd. A fainting spell or two first perhaps. There is really nothing you can do."

"Oh, yes," said Paul Dodd, "there is very much that I can do, although I have no doubt about Susan's condition. We just had to be sure, didn't we Towson?" He began an awkward

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thanks for Dr. Preston's coming out for so little, but Towson interrupted, and then the two of them drove off and left him.

Paulson's Park consisted of a few long board tables set in the edge of a small pine grove, a paint-scarred, tent-covered merry-go-round, a stretch of meadow, and a pathway leading sharply down to the strip of beach on the Sound. The Sunday-school picnic would not have been considered bona fide held elsewhere than in Paulson's Park, and the bright and blue day at the first warm edge of September which had fallen to their lot found the usual groups of summer-clad ladies hovering over the luncheon baskets, setting places with paper napkins and cardboard spoons. Most of the children, as an unnecessary stimulus to their appetites, were in for a swim. Afterward would come the picnic feast.

Paul Dodd and Susan and, of course, Twinkle were down on the beach with the others. He had put her into a tiny slip of a blue bathing suit with a white fish embroidered on it and, although she could not really go into the water, she had quite a time, as she said, wetting her toes. That meant letting the fan-like spread of the gentle waves come in over her scampering feet. In the end, however, she came running back to him breathless and frightened because a whole wave had gone over Benny Trout's head. Benny himself, spitting salt water and entirely undismayed, regarded her terror with stolid masculine disdain, while Twinkle, with a rime of sea foam on his nose, cocked his querulous little head and emitted a ludicrous growl.

Mrs. Wilcox, dark-eyed and yearning, apparently getting some relief from the activity of her hands, presided over the Dodds' table. She had prepared the basket and, as Susan put it, they really did have ginger-cake men with white sugar eyes and lemonade which was as pink as you please, and would Paul kindly not watch to see how many cups of it she drank? Although their small group was the object of many curious glances, the visiting from table to table going on generally among the others seemed to pass them by.

The picnic luncheon was nearly over. Mrs. Wilcox had produced as a climax another orange cake with "Susan" writen on it in blue icing, and Susan herself and Paul Dodd and even Mrs. Wilcox clapped their hands while Twinkle barked uncertainly.

Then Twinkle disappeared. The flapping edge of Mrs. Trout's tablecloth caught his momentary fancy, and he watched its

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dangling, tantalizing movement above his head for some time. Then he made a jump.

The crash, the screaming, the excited voices, and Twinkle's astonished yelping as Mrs. Trout belabored him with a long heavy kitchen spoon all happened so quickly. The whole picnic rushed to the scene of excitement, and in its van was a tiny, golden-headed fury in a white-and-blue dress who dived under the wreckage of the table to gather her darling up in her arms and rescue him from further punishment. "You stop!" she shouted at Mrs. Trout, her high treble sounding above the din. "You stop or my Paul will—will— I'll call my bumble bees, and they'll sting you and sting you—"

Mrs. Trout was equally and less excusably beside herself. "Take your nasty little dog," she said. "Why doesn't your father keep the both of you at home where you belong—with your crazy talk—if he really is your father? God only knows who you Dodds are—"

Martha Towson, wiping strawberry ice cream from her skirt, joined in: "Yes, if she's too particular for the Sunday school she ought to be too particular for the Sunday-school picnic."

Silence smothered the clamor as quickly as it had arisen. There was a sudden retreat of the whole circle from its center, as if they had just remembered. Susan lay where she had fallen, a collapsed little bundle of white. And then Paul Dodd broke through and gathered her up in his arms. For a moment he stood there with her, trembling, but he did not seem such a little man. He seemed colossal, towering, while he trembled.

That was an instant of swift insight for Paul Dodd. He felt Susan's faint and fast breathing upon his cheek, and he knew that she had not gone. She had fainted, and he knew that if she had not fainted, her world—the gossamer world of delight which he and she had created for her few years—would have burst like one of her soap bubbles against the rough surface of a more real and rugged world. He knew that he would have failed again; that he had almost bungled as of old. But she had fainted before the bubble burst, and the Princess Susanna breathed softly in his arms. The tools of his infinite and delicate fabrication were still in his hands, which, although they trembled, had not yet struck amiss.

He was sitting beside Susan's white bed when she opened her wide little eyes and smiled as though everything were gay—if one

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but knew. She and Paul knew what a delightful business everything was. "Do you know what a dream I had, Paul? Well, I dreamed that we had started out for the Marvelous City. Don't you think it's about time we did start, Paul? The Purple Prince may get tired of waiting. He might just take any old little princess. I think it's time we started. I mean really, Paul."

Mrs. Wilcox and Dr. Towson waited downstairs. The doctor had told Paul Dodd that he must be ready, for she would not last until morning. But Dodd knew better. He and Susan had a rendezvous to keep before she could go. So he remained there only until the white, blinking lids came down over her eyes again. Then he went downstairs, stopped in his study for a small roll of ten-dollar bills which he had left in his desk drawer, and, mumbling something to the doctor about going to the village, left the house. Dr. Towson put his hand on Mrs. Wilcox's arm. "No," he said, "let him alone. Dodd knows what he's doing."

Susan lasted until morning, the bluest and earliest and gayest morning she had ever seen. Paul was driving, and she, in her very best white dress, her white socks, her patent-leather slippers and everything, rested comfortably against a pillow in the seat beside him; for naturally she would not look her best when they arrived if she were tired. In the tonneau was a big brown paper bundle which Paul had picked up in the village, and on the back seat, with his paw carefully bound and a savoir faire equal to the occasion, sat the apparently unrepentant culprit of yesterday. So Bromley's old car struck the Boston Post Road, to give it an unsuitable name, and headed southwestward for the Marvelous City of the Purple-Hooded Prince.

"I suppose it's far away over hill and down dale, isn't it, Paul?" asked Susan. "Could anybody but you find it?" She was like some beautifully fragile figurette in ivory with two intensely blue little dots painted in for eyes. It was an effort for her to talk, but no one told her not to. She just talked whenever she wanted, although as a mark of deference to the dignity of the day she had expressly forbidden her Twinkle to do any of his barking.

New Haven did not notice, and neither did Bridgeport. It was none of Stamford's business, and Larchmont and Greenwich could think what they pleased. Susan was asleep most of the way, waking for brief moments to ask if they were almost there. Once she seemed to have fainted, but that lasted only a few minutes,

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and soon Susan roused herself, laughing with her usual glee. "What will Benny Trout say when he sees me wearing my crown, Paul? Well, he can have my bubble pipe."

Farther down, for purposes of his own, Paul Dodd turned aside from the main route upon a road which led diagonally into high ground south of White Plains. They climbed a long hill, and then he brought the car to a halt, waiting for Susan to discover for herself. Presently she leaned forward, excited, pointing with three fingers at once. "Look, Paul! See? 'Way over there. It's it!"

A hazy distance stretched away below them, and at its farthest, seeming to appear above a faintly purple border of horizon cloud, rose a stalactite profusion of towers, visible intermittently and then only at their sun-gilded peaks.

"It's just as you said, Paul," said Susan. But presently, smiling and sighing in her content, she was asleep again.

She must have been asleep for a long time. When she opened her eyes and sat up again, she could hardly believe it. She was in the very heart of the Marvelous City, with all the great houses made of big stones and all the shining windows and all the twenty hundred motors in two great parades, one going each way, and all the thirty million hundred people lining the wide street and, but for the great roar of the Marvelous City, she knew she would hear them say: "Oh, it's the beautiful little Princess Susanna herself."

Susan could see very plainly that all eyes were bent upon her triumphal chariot—as, indeed, many of them were—and her sense of obligation rose to the moment. She stood up in the seat and waved and smiled, especially when anybody waved to her. Occasionally she gave a sly glance at her Paul, as if to say: "We knew it would be like this, didn't we?"

Up ahead a whistle blew to herald her approach, and a great light blinked red. Their car stopped when a huge man in blue and buttons held up his hand and saluted them, and then still another parade passed in review right before their eyes. Susan was so thrilled. She stood up again and waved to everybody who waved to her.

Subsiding when they moved on again, she watched Paul to see how he was taking all this. "Don't you think we ought to be hurrying on to the Prince?" she asked. "Maybe he won't like everybody seeing me first. Oh!—is that his palace?" She

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pointed down the avenue at a massive structure of steel and stone rearing in terraced sections until its bright dome seemed drawn against the sky.

"His palace is taller even than that," said Paul Dodd.

"Oh!" said Susan again. "And will he be waiting in his purple robe?"

"He will probably come out on the balcony and throw down flowers when you come," said Paul.

Susan's impressions were blurred. Twice more she sat up and pointed out sky-reaching towers which surely must be "it." But each time Paul said, "Taller than that, Susan." Magic names were also on Paul Dodd's lips. They had come down Fifth Avenue and crossed to Park and now moved slowly northward between its square bulks of stone toward a stupendous white column, conceived in the mighty poetry of the genius of New York and mounting infinitely to some pin-point zenith of the imagination against the blue. Some called it the Ritz Towers and people lived there and paid rent, but Paul Dodd called it the Palace of the Purple-Hooded Prince. "There, Susan," he said. "There!"

While they rolled onward Susan lay back against her pillow, reaching out her hand toward the great white tower as if she wanted to pull it to her. Then it loomed suddenly over them, and the car stopped still at the very gate. "Where is he, Paul?" she whispered. "Is he putting on his purple hood?"

"I think he is," said Paul Dodd. "I think he will soon appear on that balcony. Do you see the balcony, Susan? Now I will go inside and announce that the beautiful little Princess Susanna is here at last."

He took the brown paper bundle from the tonneau and strode past an astonished doorman into the dim interior. He was gone only a minute, a portentous minute for Paul Dodd. But two of his ten-dollar bills and the luck of finding an Irish bell boy was all that he needed.

Susan did not even look at him when he took his seat at the wheel again, although her hand reached out and closed upon his fingers. Her rapt gaze was upon the lowest balcony, not very far above their heads. Paul Dodd's eyes were upon the balcony, too, although he could not see. He could only wait for Susan's exclamation of delight, her quick, tight grip upon his fingers while his arm supported her. "Oh!" she said. "See him, Paul! He has on his purple robe, and his crown has golden points. Catch

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the flowers, Paul. He is throwing me his blossoms." Then he felt her little form relax and he knew that the Princess Susanna had been crowned forevermore in a kingdom which was never in this world.

Bromley's old machine moved slowly forward to the next traffic stop with Paul Vane Dodd at the wheel. Once more his stature seemed to have increased until he was not a little man at all. He was a man whose soul was full of iron, and cased in the iron was a rare and precious treasure which could never be taken from him and the possession of which made him mighty and unconquerable. It was a treasure he had made himself, without bungling and with fine craftsmanship to the very end. He smiled at the stone of New York, which was only putty to be molded after all. He spoke the name of Susan, and his voice drowned out the roar of a metropolis.

North Mercer saw no more of the Dodds, and, although the name of Paul Vane Dodd became known to most people, the people of North Mercer never even wondered if that could be the one they had known as "little Dodd."

But once they might have seen him, because he stopped at Bromley's garage to have some air put in the tires of his huge, shining new car, and if they might have been excused for not recognizing him, they should at least have known the lively but dignified interest which his four-footed companion was expending upon the garage cat. When his car was ready Paul Vane Dodd drove on to a grove of trees, one of which was said to be a chocolate tree that sprouted caramels, although he saw no indication of any such phenomenon now. So he went on looking for other things, a tiny brook-made pond which had once appeared to be an ideal Peering Pool should any princesses happen to be passing by that way.

Afterward he turned back across the winding meadow road and stopped his car on the hilltop. He climbed out and sat down on the gray stone wall. A bluejay joined him, not ten yards away, and a big yellow butterfly flopped by overhead. Climbing across the meadow from the direction of the mud puddle which used to be down in the hollow, a black spot was becoming distinguishable as the figure of a small though not so very small, venturing boy.

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